

Greek American Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

With

George Tzikas

April 6, 2006
Sacramento, California

By Shawn Scarborough
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Greek American Oral History Project

Interview History for Oral History of
George Tzikas

Interviewers Name: Shawn Scarborough

Interview Date and Location: The interview was conducted on April 6, 2006, in Mr. Tzikas' home in Sacramento, California

Context Notes: Mr. Tzikas is an immigrant from the Island of Crete. During the interview clinking saucers, a door creaking and dogs barking can be heard. At two points during the interview, the tape recorder was stopped at Mr. Tzikas' request. The first was to assure Mr. Tzikas he was not talking too much and the second was to allow Mr. Tzikas to get a DVD of the documentary he was in which he gave to me. The DVD has been passed along with this interview.

Mr. Tzikas is a prolific storyteller. He speaks quickly and says "um" and "uh" when he is gathering his thoughts. This occurs with some frequency on the tape and is recorded on the transcript.

Tape and Interview Records: The original tape recording of the interview and a full transcript are held by the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Sacramento. Copies of the recording and transcript are deposited with the Department of Special Collections and University Archives at California State University, Sacramento.

[Session 1, April 6, 2006]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

SCARBOROUGH: This is Shawn Scarborough; this is April 6, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. George Tzikas in his home in Sacramento, California for the Greek American Oral History Project. Okay Mr. Tzikas, let's begin by talking a little bit about your background. Where were you born and when?

TZIKAS: I was born June 18, 1918 in a small village in the island of Crete called Ano Meros.

SCARBOROUGH: Can you spell that for me?

TZIKAS: Spell it?

SCARBOROUGH: Yes, please.

TZIKAS: uh... A-N-O-M-capital M-E-R-O-S.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Which means alta-ville, high place.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and uh, can you tell me a little bit about your mother? Um, where was she born and when was she born?

TZIKAS: Um, my mother was born uh, in the same village, uh, her name was Eleni, uh, maiden name Lynoxilakis...

SCARBOROUGH: Can you spell that for me too please?

TZIKAS: L-Y-N-O-X-I-L-A-K-I-S. Lynoxilakis.

SCARBOROUGH: And the spelling of her first name again? The spelling of her first name?

TZIKAS: Uh, spelling of her first name... Elaine or Eleni, E-L-E-N-I.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay. And you father? Where was he born?

TZIKAS: Uh, my father was born also, um, in Ano Meros. His first name was Aristides.

SCARBOROUGH: And how is that spelled?

TZIKAS: A-R-I-S-T-I-D-E-S.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and his last name, same as yours?

TZIKAS: Same.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay... And do you have any siblings?

TZIKAS: Yes I have. We were ten of them.

SCARBOROUGH: Ten, wow. And can you give me their names too?

TZIKAS: I can.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: The first one was Emmanuel. Second was... Nicholas.

SCARBOROUGH: Can you spell that for me?

TZIKAS: N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S

SCARBOROUGH: Okay

TZIKAS: The third one was Frosyni. F-R-O-S-Y-N-I.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Uh, the next one was Markos. M-A-R-K-O-S.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

- TZIKAS: The next one was, uh, Chrisi, which is C-H-R-I-S-I.
- SARBOROUGH: Okay.
- TZIKAS: Uh...the next one...that girl, Chrisi, and Markos died together in the same week...
- SCARBOROUGH: Oh, that's too bad.
- TZIKAS: During the Whooping Cough, uh, that killed millions of people in the world. So, the next one again was the name Chrisi. And then I came along, George.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay.
- TZIKAS: Then came another boy, uh, Theodore.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay.
- TZIKAS: He died also. Then another girl, Theodora.
- SCARBOROUGH: And that's just with an "A" on the end?
- TZIKAS: Yes.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay.
- TZIKAS: And the last one was Maria.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay.
- TZIKAS: Are they ten? Can you...
- SCARBOROUGH: That's ten. (laugh) It gets confusing, doesn't it? So, um, altogether did you just have three sisters, or four?
- TZIKAS: Five sisters and five brothers.
- SCARBOROUGH: Um...Frosyni...did I say that correctly? She's the...
- TZIKAS: Frosyni is, uh, was a girl. She...

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: She's dead now.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay. Wonderful. And were they all born in Greece?

TZIKAS: All, all of us were born in the same house.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow.

TZIKAS: The island of Crete, by the way.

SCARBOROUGH: Right, Crete. . . and can you describe the place where you lived in Crete?

TZIKAS: Um. . . I like also to say that this village is in the in Rethymnon, that's like a state.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Rethymnon. R-E-T-H-Y-M-N-O-N.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Crete.

SCARBOROUGH: And was that, was the, the city you lived in, was it in the country, or was it urban, was it in the city?

TZIKAS: Uh, up in the high mountains, in the village.

SCARBOROUGH: So it was pretty rural?

TZIKAS: Very, very rural.

SCARBOROUGH: How did your parents earn a living there?

TZIKAS: By farming our land and raising a lot of sheep and goats.

SCARBOROUGH: What crops did they grow?

TZIKAS: Olive oil mostly, some wheat and oats and barley. Basically for our own use. And, of course, a lot of wine, lots of wine. Good wine. So, how we were making our living was what we produced from the land. A lot of vegetables, lot of vegetables, all kinds of vegetables, again for our own use. And then from the sheep, we would sell the wool, and the lambs, and the cheese and we were self sustained. Uh, not too much left over to sell. What we would sell, for example, olive oil or cheese, or wool, was to buy rice, clothes, shoes. It was a self-sustained family, as everyone else was the same way.

SCARBOROUGH: Do you have any strong early memories from Crete?

TZIKAS: Very strong. I remember everything as if it was yesterday.

SCARBOROUGH: Is there a particular story you might want to tell?

TZIKAS: Well for example I'll tell you one story that I've told to a lot of people and, it was surprising to some of them how I could remember those things but for example, the belief in those years was that if a woman was nursing the baby, uh, while the baby was nursing she could not conceive another baby. I don't know how true that was, but they believed it at that time. So my mother, after eight children, I guess she didn't want to have anymore, so she was nursing me for a long time and come time to start milking the sheep, uh... my father was the cheese maker... he took me with him. He put me on top of the donkey, tied me with ropes so I

wouldn't fall off, and up to the mountains into a cave, where we, he was making the cheese and milking the sheep and making cheese and my world changed all together. Because there were no mother, of course, and only four, five people that they were tending the sheep, milking the sheep, my father would make the cheese and many times I was left all alone in the cave, and, I mean, I was probably no more than three, but I remember all that. And the whole world was the cave where I used to stay all by myself many, many times during the day, because the sheep herders were up in the mountains and my father would go to the village to bring more supplies. He wouldn't take me back, because then he would have a problem probably to take me back to the mountains. So, for months I was all alone... with the sheepherders, of course... with my father, my two brothers and some other people that we had hired.

So when was time to shear the sheep is like a big celebration. People come from all over to help sheer the sheep and stay overnight and slaughter a few lambs... it's a big celebration. So when somebody said the people from the village, the company from the village is coming up, I ran out of the cave to see them, barefooted by the way, and I saw my mother in the head of the whole group. I didn't want to have anything to do with her, I just... I don't know what made me feel that way but I took off the

side of the mountain. She came after me, she went, her arms, extended her arms to embrace me, and I just took off. She tried and she tried and she tried to approach me and I would just take off. She would come near me and I would take off. I wouldn't want her to touch me. And finally, she told me, she said "I have some new clothes for you." And she touched me and I melted. I mean that was the mother's touch. I remember, she slept in the side of a rock over there, and she was holding me all night in her arms, sitting on her legs and sleeping together. And the next morning, the celebration was over, they got ready to go back to the village, and of course we had to stay in the mountains, and I told my father, I said, "I'm going with my mother." He says, "No, no, no, no, no you don't want to go with the women! We're men here! This is a man's place!" I was disappointed, but of course, I had no choice, I stayed.

My growing years, my childhood was very tough. But, I regret nothing. Not at all, because I still can see the environment, the mountains, the vultures flying over, the eagles, um, all the elements. I feel that helped me to become stronger because I was alone. I had to think how to survive. But yeah, that was, that was my beginning, which was not very pleasant, but like I said, I don't regret that.

So I grew up, like that, in the village. All of us had to contribute, no matter how small, how young, or how old. My father had a rule: each one of us, every morning, had an assignment, somebody would go... our properties were all over, so he would assign one of us to go somewhere to do something and that thing had better had been done. There was no such a word as to say no. He was the master. Not only my father, all the fathers, and he was the master, to do all the work. And my mother, of course, was to wash, to cook, to bake, to take care of children. And that was the life of the village.

So I grew up like that then and never went to the city until I was twenty years old, that the country called me to duty, serve, because over there everybody has to serve in the army. That was the first time that I went to the city.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow.

TZIKAS: I left the Isle of Crete. They shipped all of us to the farthest north part of Greece. Stayed there for two and a half years. Then the war started. So I was in the war.

SCARBOROUGH: You want me to stop it? Okay. [Tape stopped because Mr. Tzikas was concerned he was talking too much and not letting me ask questions. Tape stopped for approx. one minute.]

TZIKAS: So, 1940, 1939 actually, the Second World War started, I was in the army at that time, we were prepared for the war. We knew that

Germany would not stop at any, uh place, but takeover the entire continent. So, 1940, October 28th, Italy attacked my country, Greece. And of course, we made a fool of their leader, Mussolini. We destroyed his troops in Albania. And eh, April 6, 1941, Hitler also attacked Greece. At that time I was in the north part of Greece by an area called uh, Kavala. . . a city above, the city in the mountains. The Germans attacked us with all their might because at that time they had taken over the entire Eastern Europe. Only Russia was not taken over yet. Hitler had conquered Eastern Europe, the Balkans, except Yugoslavia and Greece. Yugoslavia, they drove through with no resistance to speak of, and they, the Germans took over Thessaloniki, which is the capital of Northern Greece. Thus they, well, they cut off our army, entirely, with no communications and the command was given by our general to destroy our arms, whatever we could destroy, and retreat and God help you.

I was caught prisoner by the Germans with many thousands of other Greek soldiers. We were closed into an old fort in the city of Kavala for three days, no food, no bread, nothing to eat. So I told two of my friends that I'm gonna jump the walls. It was an old castle, very high walls, but, I was young, I didn't know any better. I guess I had more guts than brains. So, I jumped and I told my friends: "If you hear the machine guns outside the walls, that

means that they kill me so don't jump." I guess I was lucky, I escape. My friends, they jumped also, they came with me.

We were traveling the mountains of Northern Greece. That area's called Thrace and moved west because we could hear from the villages, they would give us news, that the British, together with the Greek Army, are fighting in the mountain of Olympus and they stop the Germans. So we thought that's the place for us to go.

I want to point out something here that it's, uh... I don't know if it it's, I don't know what it is, it's a deep faith or great stupidity. The villages we were going by, they would give us food, whatever they had to give us, because they didn't have very much themselves. But they told us, "Just change your clothes. Throw away your uniform, the Greek Army uniform; we'll give you civilian clothes, you just mix with us, nobody, the Germans won't bother you." But, we were taught that it was a dishonor, ever, to remove your uniform while you were in the Army. And, the lot, that's why I say I don't know if it's faith, dedication to freedom, or stupidity. We never change our uniform.

We caught, we got caught again by the Germans while we were trying to cross a river. At that time the river was coming down like, uh, uh, heavy, heavy rains, and eh, during that time in April, there are heavy rains up in that north part of Greece. So I was, during the night I were trying to cross the river, they, they had

guards there. We got caught again...and all day we were marching with them until we reached a um, a lake, a natural lake called Volvee. And while they were, were camping there, the Germans tried to camp there, and cook and try to prepare their food for the evening and so forth, we found a chance and through the bushes and we escaped again. So we took off up the mountains and from there we managed to reach a place in Crete, it's called Agion Oros, Mountain Athos . It's a place that has many monasteries and no female of any kind is allowed to cross that boundary.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow.

TZIKAS: So from there the monks helped us with a fishing boat and we took off from Mountain Athos through the Aegean Sea, the Greek Isles, islands, traveling during the night and stopped during the day on a small island. And finally, April 27, uh, we met... we had information that the English fleet was coming to save the British troops, Australians and New Zealanders, and we met them in a port called Portorafi, it's east of Athens. They picked us up and we arrived in the Island of Crete early in the morning, April 19... April 28th, 1941.

Again from there, with my two friends, we got on a bus to go to Rethymnon, which is another, another city. We arrived in Souda Bay with the English fleet. We went to Rethymnon and I asked my friends, "We have to go back to the Army camp. When

we put this Greek uniform on, we have to go back to it. We brought it back, we have to go there." The other two told me, says "You must be crazy. For two years we haven't seen our parents, our friends, our family. We're going home." I didn't, I just couldn't. I went back to the Army, to the Army camp where I first put on the uniform. Presented myself to the first, officer that I met. Now, at that time, Greece had fallen, all of Greece had fallen, the German's occupation, and only Crete was the only free part of Greece, the Island of Crete. So, it was, uh, confusion, fear, because all the armed forces, the able men from Crete were shipped up to Albania to fight the Italians. So the Island of Crete was disarmed. Not only from weapons, but from men, the able men were in Albania. However a few of us that were there, the men and women, whatever guns we had we got prepared for the German invasion which came, the German invasion by air, the first drop from the German paratroopers May 20, 1941, and we were waiting for them. With the few guns that we had, when they were coming down, uh, those that had guns dropped them like flies. The battle lasted for ten days. There was not an English airplane flying in Crete to fight the German air force, therefore, they were free to come as low as the ground allowed them too. And I remember, as low as they were flying, in the first of the, um, the propeller, the olive trees were shaking, they came that low.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow.

TZIKAS: So, anyway, that's a long story. We have made, recently, a documentary for that, which is very, very good, I think, describing all that. And after ten days, the Germans overtook one area of Crete. They had overtaken the airport; they're landing troops and munitions. We had no supplies. We had no supplies and no support from anybody. So, Crete fell, also, May 31st, 1941.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow. Uh, what was the title of that documentary? Have they named it yet?

TZIKAS: The Eleventh Day.

SCARBOROUGH: How.....Okay, no problem. [Mr. Tzikas asked the tape to be stopped so he could get me a copy of the documentary and use the restroom. Mrs. Tzikas said the documentary was done by Chris Epperson. The tape was stopped for approx. 5 minutes.]

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, so, um, when you left Greece, was it, when you left Crete, was it just you or did your family leave also?

TZIKAS: No, before we go to that...

SCARBOROUGH: Certainly.

TZIKAS: I'm going to give you this DVD...

SCARBOROUGH: Oh really? Thank you.

TZIKAS: For you to play it and watch it. I'm gonna give it you.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, I can burn a copy of it actually, and I'll give it back. Thank you so much.

TZIKAS: When I left Greece, I left because... no, let's go back, let's go back a little bit.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Because what happened to me between, after Crete fell, May 31st til May 23rd 1945.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: After they took over, the Germans took over Crete, then I joined the Resistance. So, for four years, I was up in the Cretan mountains or by the seashore because I was with civilian clothes. Germans didn't know who I was, didn't know I was a guerilla fighter. So I was fighting the Germans all over Crete: in the mountains, in the seashore, in the valleys, or whatever, sabotages, whatever.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow.

TZIKAS: So, I spent four years in the guerilla fighting forces. I guess, during that time, during that time, April 27th, 1944, um, the British intelligence service... we had English soldiers and officers there with wireless services that were supplying us guns, ammunitions, but also report of the activities, the activities of the Germans, the strength of the Germans, the locations of their defense locations. They were reporting that from Crete to Cairo, to their headquarters.

So we had a constant communication with the British headquarters in Cairo and the Greek government in exile.

So, one of the British officers named, Patrick Livermore, conceived an idea that we kidnap the German commanding general in the Island of Crete. So April 27, 1944, we kidnapped the German general...the only general that was kidnapped during the entire Second World War.

SCARBOROUGH: What did you do with him after you had him?

TZIKAS: We had him up in the mountains. We treat them, treat him, with the utmost respect. Fed him, protect him from the cold and the elements and finally send him to Cairo. And he came back to Greece and meet those that were still alive, the kidnappers. So that was, you'll see that in the DVD.

Because of the kidnapping of the general, my area, where I was born is called Amari, A-M-A-R-I. It was the most active county in Crete and the most secure for the guerilla fighters and the British officers. The British officers were about a dozen in the entire island. It was a, a retreat, a safe place. And uh, no people cooperated with the enemy, ever, so that's why it was a safe place for the British officers and the guerilla fighters. The German's, though, knew that. So because, after we kidnapped the General, went through the county, this county, county of Amari, because it was safe, the Germans found out, so August 24, in the morning,

they had surrounded eight villages, including my village, Ano Maros. They selected all the able men and killed them, immediately that day. The rest of them, they tell them they have one hour to pick up what you can from your houses, because we are going to destroy and burn your houses. So they left, of course, in panic, and uh...my village was destroyed. Totally destroyed. With 42 people killed, and the German's killed everything that was moving... cats, dogs, rabbits, chickens, donkeys, cows, everything. No life. Whatever the fire could not burn, they dynamited it. Even the church of the village, even the water fountain, fresh water that was coming from a, what they call a vrisi, a spring, water spring. They dynamite that also.

So, after the war, there was nothing for me. All I knew up to that time was either going up the mountains with my father's flock of sheep or fighting an enemy, after seven and a half years in the army and the guerilla forces. So, no home... nothing else... so I thought, America probably will be the place for me. So I left my village. My father, by the way, was killed by the Germans, and my mother was very, very, very ill at the time. And uh, one thing that I really remember, when she hugged me and kissed me, gave me her blessing, and she told me: "Who did you ask to bury me?" And uh... that's a heavy burden that I bring with my heart always. "Who did you ask to bury me?" My younger sisters were single,

everything was destroyed, uh, the property that we had was not enough to give any income, the flock of sheeps that we had were gone, so I took the road to the country of plenty and the country of open arms for the poor.

SCARBOROUGH: So, were you the only son that survived?

TZIKAS: My first brother was killed also during the war. My second brother, his house destroyed, he was married with three children so he left the village to try to protect his family. And my two older sisters were married, they survived. My two young sisters were single and they survived also. So, December 16, 1946, I left Greece aboard one of the old American victory transports which some Greek ship owner had changed to a transport ship. They had named it "City of Athens."

So I board the "City of Athens", I left Greece December 16, 1946, and I arrive in New York January 1st, 1947, New Year's Day. And New Year's Day was good luck for me. I didn't know anyone, no one. I had two letters from friends to give them to some people in New York, but where in New York? I had one single dollar in my pocket.

SCARBOROUGH: Letters of introduction?

TZIKAS: One single dollar, and didn't know where to go. So aboard ship I met somebody, another Greek, that he told me he had two brothers in New York and they would be there in the harbor to pick him up.

So I say to him, said, "Nicko, can you take me with you so your brothers may direct me to go where these two letters I have maybe?" So exactly that what happened.

SCARBOROUGH: Were you delivering the letters to someone or were they letters of introduction?

TZIKAS: One letter was from the Prime Minister of Greece to one of his friends in New York. The other letter was from a close friend of mine to his cousin in New York.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: So once I met those two people, within a short time, I had everything I wanted. They couldn't do enough for me. So, in a few days, this one friend. Told me, says, "George, we have to find a job for you. You don't have language, you don't have skills, but I'll send you to school because I want you to get an education." I told him, "Nah, no, I'm too old for that." I was... how old was I? Twenty-seven.

SCARBOROUGH: So you didn't....

TZIKAS: And he put me in a restaurant and start washing dishes. That was my first job.

SCARBOROUGH: So you didn't speak English when you came?

TZIKAS: English? Not a word.

SCARBOROUGH: No? And how did you learn English?

- TZIKAS: I went to school. This friend of mine, uh, his name was Kyriakos Stavroulakis and. . .
- SCARBOROUGH: Can I get you to spell his name?
- TZIKAS: You want to get his name?
- SCARBOROUGH: Yes please.
- TZIKAS: K-Y-R-I-A-K-O-S, first name. Last name Stravroulakis, S-T-A-V-R-O-U-L-A-L-A-K-I-S, Stravroulakis. God bless his soul. And his wife, Georgia, they took me like a son. They had two sons themselves. They hired a teacher who could speak perfectly Greek also. And she taught me the A-B-C and some of the verbs, like um, "I'm thirsty," "I'm hungry," "I want," "I do," things like that. I still have that pamphlet with me. And when she thought that I was advanced a little bit she said, "Now, you go to night school." That's what I did.
- SCARBOROUGH: And did you have any trouble trying to adjust to learning the new language and working in New York?
- TZIKAS: Very much so, because, remember, I came from the mountains, free man, entirely free. I was acting on my own free will. I was doing what I wanted. Not that I was doing crazy things, disciplined things, because it was war and I was doing what I should do for my country. Uh, and I was pretty much disciplined anyway, my father and my leader in the guerilla fighters, I was, I obeyed them. But I came to an organized society, a society that

everybody has his place and his time. And at the time, I could not adjust.

I had a problem with my throat. I, I could not swallow. So, I found a Greek doctor that I knew his family. I knew his brother. He came from the same area where I came. So after he examined me, he told me, "There's nothing wrong with you. It's the, it's the anxiety. It's the uh, the uh, closeness that you are in this society. You better start going out. Find people. Find a girlfriend. Meet other people. Just don't let the..." I couldn't sleep, I couldn't swallow. I felt that I was choking. And then, after he talked to me for a while, I met some other, uh, four, five, young men in New York that they came the same way that I did. One of them I knew. So every weekend we were together.

So, in fact, I went to a dinner dance one night and there was a young lady that we were traveling together, in the same ship. So I ask her, "How do you feel?" She says, "I'm choking. I can't breathe." I told her "That's exactly what happened to me but I went to the doctor and this is what he told me so you better do the same." Anyway, I haven't seen her since, but...it wasn't easy.

SCARBOROUGH: And how long were you in New York?

TZIKAS: A year and a half.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and then from New York did you move to Sacramento or did you stop somewhere else?

- TZIKAS: From New Youk, I came to Stockton.
- SCARBOROUGH: Stockton.
- TZIKAS: I knew a young lady. Actually, we had met in Crete. Because she was born in the United States, but she went back with her mother and brother and the war caught them there and she spent the whole years of the war there. Suffered a lot, and um, anyway, she was in Stockton, we corresponded, came to Stockton and, in 1949, July 1949, June 1949, came to Stockton and we got married.
- We got married. We had three boys.
- SCARBOROUGH: And what was her name?
- TZIKAS: Stella.
- SCARBOROUGH: And what were your son's names?
- TZIKAS: My first son is, he was born April 11, 1949, no. I came to Stockton 1948, got married, the son was born, the first son was born April 11, 1948, 1949. The second son was born in Debuke, Iowa. November 11, no, November 18, 1951. His name is Emmanuel.
- SCARBOROUGH: And the name of your first son?
- TZIKAS: I'm sorry?
- SCARBOROUGH: The name of your first son?
- TZIKAS: Aristides. Like my father's name. A-R-I-S-T-I-D-E-S.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: Uh, Debukey, Iowa was too cold. I didn't like it. California is exactly the same climate as my country. My old country, Greece. And we came back, to Stockton, and the third son, Stanley...

SCARBOROUGH: Stanley?

TZIKAS: Stanley, was born October 6, 1953.

SCARBOROUGH: And was, uh was Stella, she was, she was Greek-American. Correct?

TZIKAS: Yes.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay. Okay. And um, I'm going to go back to right when you first came over to America. Did you...

TZIKAS: No, I want to continue this because...

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: We have three boys, wonderful boys. However things didn't work out and uh, we got divorced in 1966.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay.

TZIKAS: And after a while, I met my present wife, Margo.

SCARBOROUGH: Did you have any other children?

TZIKAS: And uh, we got married June 17, 1968 and we have a son, Marcos. He was born, January 27, 1973.

SCARBOROUGH: And Margo, is she, she's not Greek-American, is she?

TZIKAS: Half and half.

SCARBOROUGH: Half and half, okay.

TZIKAS: From her father is 100% Greek.

SCARBOROUGH: Did you pursue citizenship?

TZIKAS: Yes, I have my citizenship papers.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, you were saying when you got your citizenship?

TZIKAS: I've got my citizenship papers 1954 in Stockton.

SCARBOROUGH: What do you miss most about Greece, about Crete?

TZIKAS: What I miss most?

SCARBOROUGH: What you miss most.

TZIKAS: Uh, I had during that time; I made a lot of close fiends, very close friends, we were like brothers and of course my family. The tradition. I manage to go home almost every year. But, I can't say, I never say that I'm sorry that I came to this county because I was blessed to have four wonderful sons and a wife that I love, and I have a very happy family. I'm a happy man. I was able to, although it was not easy, and I have changed a lot of jobs. For the last thirty years I'm in the real estate business and we have accomplished quite a bit. We live comfortably, let's put it that way.

I'm very happy. And also, ahem...excuse me, I was very active in the church, the Greek American organizations.

SCARBOROUGH: What organizations did you belong to?

- TZIKAS: I belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church. And I belong also to AHEPA.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and uh....
- TZIKAS: And to the Pan-Cretan Organization of, Pan-Cretan Association of America. PAA. Became president, national president. I had a chance, I was honored to meet President Clinton, have a picture with him, shaking hands. Have achieved several rewards, Army, church, including the ARCON.
- SCARBOROUGH: What's the ARCON?
- TZIKAS: The ARCON is a title given from the patriarchy, the patriarch, the ecumenical patriarch, which is named Defenders of Faith. It's similar to the, what English has, the knights.
- SCARBOROUGH: What sorts of activities did the PAA do?
- TZIKAS: The PAA?
- SCARBOROUGH: Yeah.
- TZIKAS: The PAA is actually an organization to keep the people from the island of Crete organized for education, promoting scholarships, help the poor, keep the traditions and during my presidency, I established, we established, the PAA established a scholarship that we sent Cretan kids to the University of Crete for six weeks. And it's open to other people, by the way. We fund that program and we were able to, whatever units they get after ten twelve, whatever units, to be transferable to any university in the United States.

SCARBOROUGH: That's wonderful.

TZIKAS: So, when American born Greeks go there for a summer, I guarantee you they'll go again.

SCARBOROUGH: Wow. Um, lets go back to your family, if you don't mind. Can you tell me; was it important for you to marry inside of the Greek community?

TZIKAS: [cough] It is not as much now, but then. To marry a Greek, you keep both: language, tradition, and religion. Because we Greeks, our Christian religion and the Greek history and tradition are unbreakable. Even our flag has uh, seven... nine stripes, blue and white, which signify the word eleftheria which means "freedom", then on the other side, there's a cross, the faith, the religion. So, and also, we're taught to say, we fight, as we say it in Greek, "mahometha iper pisteos kai patrithos", which means we fight for country and religion. So it was very, very strong some years back, but not as much now. However, it's coming back. The young people, here in California anyway, many of them, they try to find their own. It's, it's a matter of faith, matter of belief, matter of choice. But to me, it was very important. I couldn't think of marrying anybody else but a Greek.

SCARBOROUGH: Did your children go to Greek school?

TZIKAS: All my children went, children went to Greek school.

SCARBOROUGH: Do you remember any of the teachers names at the Greek school?

- TZIKAS: Uh, of my children/?
- SCARBOROUGH: Uh hum.
- TZIKAS: [long pause] I honestly don't.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay. And did your children attend church with you?
- TZIKAS: I, I tell you why I don't. The teachers that the church provides are parishioners, volunteers, and they change from time to time, so...
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay, that's understandable. So, uh, the church, you're an active member of the church?
- TZIKAS: Yes.
- SCARBOROUGH: And did your children attend church with you regularly?
- TZIKAS: If they are active?
- SCARBOROUGH: Um hum.
- TZIKAS: Yes.
- SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and did they go to Sunday school when they were younger?
- TZIKAS: No, not right now. They're all married, they're grown-ups.
- SCARBOROUGH: Right now. So it was important for you...or was it important for you...
- TZIKAS: Let me classify that. They are not as active as I was.
- SCARBOROUGH: At their age? Okay.
- TZIKAS: At the church. Or the PAA organization. It's a thing that uh, I'm sure that all the other ethnic groups meet the same situation. The immigrants had a strong faith. The children have a little less, and their children a little less. It's, it's uh, it's a thing that changes.

SCARBOROUGH: Do you feel that there were any conflicts between the American culture, of your children and your Greek identity?

TZIKAS: Not really because we always had Americans....and what is American? America is all of us immigrants. But my children grew up with the neighborhood kids, whatever their religion, or their background. Basically they're their best friends and I accepted that also.

In fact, somebody told me one time that, um, when I was applying for a job, and my name at that time, at that time I was not an American citizen yet. At that time my name as T-Z-I-T-Z-I-K-A-S.

SCARBOROUGH: Two...

TZIKAS: T-Z-I-T-Z-I-K-A-S.

SCARBOROUGH: I see.

TZIKAS: So, on the application I put my name there, and uh, the man at the desk says, "How you pronounce this?" And I told him. He tried, the tried, he couldn't. So he asked the man next to him, says, "Can you pronounce this name?" He looks, "Tziziziizi," says, "I can't even sneeze it." And I was insulted.

SCARBOROUGH: Ah, wow.

TZIKAS: That's my name! So, when I got my citizenship papers I eliminated one set of "TZI" so instead of Tzitzikas, it's Tzikas. So, um, but I realized that this is the country that I'm gonna make

home. And uh, in fact, that guy, he told me, says, "You're a foreigner." Again, I was insulted. I told him, "Look, you're no better American than I am. I came as a volunteer on my own. You didn't. Your father carried you in his, uh, system, when he cross the ocean." So, but it was, I mean we're talking the early '50s. And we had the hatred, and we had the fear, like uh, Joe McCarthy. And that era was turmoil in the United States. But no, I had, I have many American friends. I'm an American, from Greece, but this is home. My children feel the same way, we believe the traditions, but we are Americans. Because what is an American? The people that made it. Who are the people then? From all over the world. So, this is the whole world. This is our world.

SCARBOROUGH: Let's talk a little bit more about the Greek community here in Sacramento. First of all, when did you move to Sacramento?

TZIKAS: We got married, Margo and I, June 17, 1968 and immediately moved to Sacramento. So we've been here since 1968.

SCARBOROUGH: Can you describe the local Greek community when you first got here? Was it a large community? Was it scattered?

TZIKAS: This is a very strong Greek community, well organized, well known in the city. We have people that are recognized. We have people, all fields, doctors, lawyers, judges, developers, wealthy people. The Greek community is a thriving community.

And let me tell you about why the Greek is...the Greek community, [long pause] the Greeks in general, wherever they go, they know that they come from a civilization which is the beginning of the western civilization. The basis of democracy, the word itself, *democratia* is Greek. The system under which this country is governed is a Greek system, adapted by the fathers of this country from Greece. So it is in our blood. Like while the ancient Greeks were saying "ain aristevin", "forever excel." That's what we have and we are obedient citizens. Good citizens, and progressive people. In fact, I read somewhere that the statistics show that the Greek minority in the United States, as a minority, they are first in education. I didn't have education, very small education, grammar school in Greece. But all four children, my, our children, went to the universities, because I wanted that. I wanted them to be educated. And it's not only I, every Greek family believes in that. So, I don't know if that, no, I do know, I do believe that the Greeks knowing where they come from, and thorough the proves of the millennium its in their blood, because they learned it. From generation to generation, from grandmother, grandfather, uncles, the family, so the Greek community it's a progressive...all over, not just here in Sacramento, all over.

SCARBOROUGH: When you first got to Sacramento, was it small? Has it grown?

TZIKAS: Yes, it was a small community. Actually, we have the same church that we have now, since then; of course we have two more, one in Roseville, and one in Elk Grove.

SCARBOROUGH: Okay, and when you first got here, was there, like a Greek neighborhood, um or...?

TZIKAS: Well, in a way it was, but not as much as the first immigrants. At that time a good many, um, large number of Greeks were living in Sacramento because that's where our church is. Now we're spread out all over, all over the metropolitan area.

SCARBOROUGH: Was there a restaurant or café that you would congregate at? Drink coffee and chat with your...

TZIKAS: Yeah, we still do. Even right now, every day, just about every day of the week. I'm semi-retired, I don't have to work, but I like to get together with other Greeks in Java City. Know where Java City is, in Loheman's Plaza? Anytime, any day you go over there in the morning, you see ten, twelve, probably fifteen Greeks there. And we get together and play, uh, cards. A Greek game, only Greek's play that, called Prefa, which is similar to bridge. And in fact, I played one today and I won!

SCARBOROUGH: (laugh) That's wonderful. Did you win any money?

TZIKAS: I mean, no, no, we don't play for money. Just for the competitive.

SCARBOROUGH: Don't play for money. (laugh)

TZIKAS: That's all. We don't buy any drinks; we don't play for money, only to be the best. We are, we are competitive people.

SCARBOROUGH: (laugh) Um hum. . . Can you tell me a little bit about the role of the church in the Greek community's life?

TZIKAS: The which?

SCARBOROUGH: The role of the church in the Greek community?

TZIKAS: The role of the, the church. Our church, actually is, it's the family, it's the Greek family. The church is where we'll baptize our children. The church is, before we baptize our children we better get married. The Church is the place where we get married, baptize our children, and buried by the church. And we believe in the Holy Communion. And the church is a place, even a person who is not really a good Christian, you go to the church and there is two, three hundred people and you hear either the priest or the chanting or the choir, nobody talks, everybody listens. So you have an hour, and hour and a half to complete relax, and you have your... in other words, it's a place to discipline, to discipline your mind, and your speech, because you don't speak. You just listen and you discipline your mind. You listen, you meet friends, relatives. After the services, we go to the hall, have coffee hour and exchange greetings. And it's a family, its uh, celebration in a quiet disciplined way.

SCARBOROUGH: Can you tell me if the Sacramento Greek community has changed since you've been here? Has it...

TZIKAS: Uh, yeah it's, every, everything changes. The human race is constant, everything is in a movement, so as we move things change. Um, beliefs, not the faith. The Greek Orthodox faith never changed. The apostles took it from Jesus Christ. The apostles wrote the New Testament, which is the word of God, in the Greek language. That's important, that the New Testament is written in the Greek language because that was the language that was spoken in Judea. Because why? Alexander the Great had captured all that area.

And I want to speak, Alexander the Great was not a conqueror, Alexander the Great was a teacher. He was teaching the world about the Greek, what they call the Golden Era of Greece. And there are cities, from Egypt, Alexandria all the way to India, and people today, 2006 that claim in Afghanistan, their ancestor is Alexander the Great.

So when the apostles received the word, the word from Jesus Christ, they wrote the word of Jesus Christ in the Greek. And they spread from there to two great cities of the western civilization: Constantinople, which the, the Turks call it Istanbul, and Rome. Peter when to Rome. Paul went, and Andrew and others when all over spreading Christianity. And that Christianity,

the Orthodox remains unchangeable. The true faith, we never changed it, it's the tradition. You cannot change religion, because if you change it, then you don't believe what Jesus Christ said. So, that's the way our, we are not progressive, let's say, as much as um they, well they call themselves the born again Christians, or even the Catholic religion. The Catholic religion has millions, as an example, and I'm sure that you remember what we see in the last two three years, and I, you might be Catholic and I don't want to...

SCARBOROUGH: I'm not,

TZIKAS: No, It's the facts, because it's public knowledge that the Catholic Church spent millions of dollars in damages that the priests have created by sexually molesting children. Is that a religion? I mean, they have millions, we don't. We have a modest church; it's not that great. The value is in what the people believe and how they live their lives and what they do for their fellow man. And that's our church.

SCARBOROUGH: Well, that's wonderful. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that I haven't covered or that you wanted to say earlier?

TZIKAS: You tell me if you have any more questions.

SCARBOROUGH: I don't have any. Is there anything else that I missed?

TZIKAS: Well, good. I enjoyed very much talking to you. I thank you very much for what you are doing because this is not my story, by far. This is not my story. This is not George Tzikas speaking now. It's

the Greek voice, Because every Greek from hundred plus years ago that the original immigrants came over here, they went thorough the same thing, but they didn't have, many of them, they didn't have the chance or the opportunity that you have given me today, to record their life. So this recording is for all the Greeks. And by the way, the Greek community, by speaking Greek community I mean all the Greeks in the United States, the Greek family in the United States is about eighty-five to a hundred years old. The Greeks started coming to this country after the turn of the last century, the twentieth century. And during that short time, that I mentioned earlier about education, during this short time, the Greek community, the Greek people, almost took over the White House. Spiro Agnew was the vice-president of the United States. Things didn't happen or else he would be president. Mike Ducakis, by manipulation, from the Republicans, he lost the election. He could be and should be the president. So, again I want to emphasize the Greek spirit of learning, we have not lost it. Although, we call it an era of Percales or the Minoan civilization where I come from, from Crete, five thousand years ago. And my message to the future generations is: "Don't lose it. If you're Greek and Greek Orthodox, know thyself." So, that's my wish to those that come after us.

SCARBOROUGH: Wonderful. Well, thank you very much Mr. Tzikas.

TZIKAS: You're welcome.

[End Tape 1, Side B]